

Book Reviews

Mothering in the Third Wave

Amber E. Kinser, ed.
Toronto: Demeter Press, 2008.

Reviewed by Tatjana Takševa

In its resistance to narrow definitions of feminist living, its consideration of globalism, technology and popular culture, and its view that mothering is messy and complicated and always more complex than it seems, this edited volume will easily find its place among important third-wave feminist texts. This collection (which includes two poems) addresses a key question: What does it mean to be a mother in this particular historical moment? The essays are free of jargon, written in language that easily traverses the genres of academic prose, creative and personal narrative in an accessible, unselfconscious way. The introduction to the volume, written by Amber Kinser, models this mode of writing by weaving into its structure two poignant but aptly placed letters to her two children, in which she bravely reveals the tensions and contradictions inherent in her own feminist mothering. This method of writing demonstrates the intersections of feminism and mothering, of academic training, creativity, and lived experience, and serves to “put experiential flesh on these cognitive bones” (6).

The volume is divided into four parts. In part one, “Motherhood Transforming,” writers “explore how definitions of mothering and motherhood modify to accommodate the changing cultural landscape of the family” (9). The four essays in this section “explore the reciprocally transformative dimensions” of mothering and the larger political, socio-cultural sphere (9). Here, readers learn about a third-wave white woman who forges a life as a feminist, a mother, and a writer by reading fiction and non-fiction by black women writers (Hewett); about the fighting of “infrastructures and symbolic boundaries that keep queer women from having children” (Ryan 6); about mothering through the disaster of Hurricane Katrina, remembering that feminism should accommodate ambiguities and women’s multiple personalities and recognize the “limited nature of ‘women’s issues’, particularly those of the white bourgeois variety” (Tuley, 47); and about mothering during first-hand experience of global conflict and

terrorist attacks in the Middle East, the United Kingdom, and the United States (Lengel, Birzescu, and Minda).

The three essays and one poem in part two, "Mothering Resistance," show how mothering can serve as a site of resistance and can teach principles of revolution that can "nurture others toward self-liberation" (Kinser 10). Mercado-Lopez, a Chicana mother-scholar, reconceptualizes Chicana motherhood as a site of cultural contradiction where nothing is stable and the maternal, "brown body is acknowledged as a body of knowledge" within a "third-space Chicana motherhood praxis" (75, 76). Fine, a woman raised in the second wave who is now raising children in the third wave, and a proud lesbian soccer mom, reclaims mothering as an instrument of resistance in an attempt to negotiate multiple identities. Fechner's poem addresses the feelings of doubt, anger, and love she experiences as an adoptive white mother of biracial, special needs children and contests cultural images of motherhood as Utopia. Adomako Ampofo's essay focuses on her experience of growing up in Ghana among trans-racial families; she argues that "mothers who classify themselves as members of a social category that is presumed to be distinct from that of their children can contest and disrupt hierarchies of inequality by challenging racist ideologies and constructions" (100).

The writers in "Mothering Contradictions," part three of this collection, confront the inconsistencies and ambivalence in their own lives and explore the "ambiguity, tension, contradiction and personal struggle in feminist mothering" (Kinser 11). Drawing on her own struggle with motherhood as a form of feminist identity, O'Brien Hallstein argues that the tension between intensive and empowered mothering—a "postfeminist" third wave phenomenon—can be located in the second wave's emphasis on giving birth to oneself, which leaves a problematic silence about giving birth to one's children. Kinser's essay counters the cultural split between the maternal and the erotic, proposing that we locate mothering on a sexual continuum to "help us make sense of and work through its emotional intensity *and* offer safe haven to our children" (125). While Jones Nakanishi discusses her struggles to reconcile the complexities of feminist living with family-entrenched cultural traditions in Japan, Dorgan's essay argues for embracing "militancy" when mothering a special needs child, as part of the "breadth and depth of femaleness" and all that is within "the Mother: anger, disappointment, kindness, rage, sacrifice, vulnerability" (145). Arnold's poem explores eating disorders, mothering, and empowerment in ways that stretch the limits of feminism.

Part four, "Representing Motherhood," investigates the representation of mothering practices in a variety of cultural contexts. Driver engages with the poetic life writings of Cherrie Moraga, a Chicana lesbian mother whose representations of queer mothering defy binary sexual, racial, and gender ideologies. Ferguson and King's essay examines the values of Gangsta Rap Hip Hop music and life style and its scarring, traumatic effect on Black girls and women in general, and African American teen mothers in particular. Bullier reads the

representations of the maternal body in contemporary art, specifically in the context of second and third wave feminism. Investigating the representation of motherhood and its practices in Cyberspace, Stadtman Tucker suggests that “third wave mothers may cultivate an online persona to restore their self-concept as cultural citizens and to relieve (or complain about) their sense of displacement” (201). Interestingly, she points out that “the most surprising parallel between second-wave feminists and third-wave mother bloggers is the accusation that some women are exploiting the strengths and vulnerabilities of the collective project to increase their personal status” (206).

The real strength of this collection is that it does not seek to define, classify, or explain; rather, it explores, through variety and contradiction, the messy but often affirming practices of motherhood in the third wave. An important third-wave feminist text, the book is a significant contribution to the study of mothering.

Ready: Why Women Are Embracing the New Later Motherhood

Elizabeth Gregory.
New York: Basic Books, 2007.

Reviewed by Elena Neiterman

Ready examines the phenomenon of later motherhood. Author Elizabeth Gregory analyzes the experiences of 113 American women who became first-time mothers after the age of 35, through either natural birth or adoption. Gregory, an older mother herself, considers the new later motherhood a positive phenomenon. Her book follows the personal stories of women who chose to postpone motherhood and considers the effects of that decision on their lives.

Although her book is based on the personal experiences of women, Gregory considers the wider social context of the phenomenon of later motherhood. For instance, Gregory argues that the availability of birth control and infertility treatments allows women to choose when they wish to start a family. Similarly, changing social attitudes toward career women, working mothers, older mothers, and single mothers influence women's decisions to postpone pregnancy. Such trends contribute to the emergence of later motherhood: “over the past thirty years, the number of U.S. women who had their first child between the ages of 35 and 39 has *multiplied by ten* ... and there are now *thirteen times* as